“Four years ago, when I was something of a YouTube health celebrity, I was on top of the world [and ...] the diet pyramid. I ate the cleanest, most nutritious diet on the planet (or so I thought). A raw-vegan diet . . . not only pure in its contents but also pure in its intention.

With this type of diet, you eat straight from the earth, only as nature intended. I ate kale salad, raw nut butter, goji berries, raw chlorella, and dehydrated flax crackers. I drank green smoothies, green juice, wheatgrass, and hemp milk. I even tried a fruitarian diet . . . I thought about food from the moment I woke up until the second I fell asleep . . . I was an addict in search of the purest dope: raw, vegan, organic food . . . I was hoodwinked on a path of self-destruction. So it’s not surprising that, like any hardcore addict, I eventually hit rock bottom.”

Kevin Gianni started researching natural health care therapies and prevention in 2002, when he was struck with the realization that cancer ran deep in his family and if he didn’t change the way he was living, he might well go down the same path. Since then, he has experimented with a wide range of diets and medical protocols in his quest to separate myth from reality. Along the way, he has written hundreds of articles and six self-published books on natural health, diet, and fitness, and has produced more than 900 YouTube videos, garnering over 10 million views to date. He continues to travel the world searching for the best methods, foods, medicines, and clinics to introduce to readers of his blogs, Renegade Health (www.RenegadeHealth.com) and www.KevinGianni.com. One of the most widely read health and nutrition world today should be encouraging to anyone who’s ever tried a fad diet and failed.

“Kale and Coffee” is the often hilarious, pictorial tale of how Gianni went from skinny, raw-food vegan faddist to bloated, out of shape omnivore before finding the middle way to an imperfectly healthy and (more) balanced life. The journey takes him from the Peruvian Andes to salt flats in Mexico to a pig farm and a butcher shop near his northern California home. Along the way, he has his brain scanned and his pantry tested for toxic metals to separate myth from reality. Along the way, he has his brain scanned and his pantry tested for toxic metals.

“Kale and Coffee” offers practical tips for wellness, from testing your body—and pantry—for toxic metals to selecting the healthiest coffee, wines, and green drinks to consume. And don’t miss the Kale and Coffee 21-Day Jumpstart to launch you on your own journey of transformation.

With the humor and practical wisdom that have delighted millions, Gianni shows you how to sidestep the health hype, diet fads, and weight-loss promises littering the path to wellness. As he cycled through “healthy” diets—vegetarian, vegan, raw foods, and more—he got sicker and sicker. Finally, he hit bottom and had to give up healthy eating to save his life. Kale and Coffee is the often hilarious, pictorial tale of how Gianni went from skinny, raw-food vegan faddist to bloated, out of shape omnivore before finding the middle way to an imperfectly healthy and (more) balanced life. The journey takes him from the Peruvian Andes to salt flats in Mexico to a pig farm and a butcher shop near his northern California home. Along the way, he has his brain scanned and his pantry tested for toxic metals.

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Praise for *Kale and Coffee*

“Fantastic! One of the most entertaining health books I’ve ever read.”
—Sara Gottfried, M.D., *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Hormone Cure*

“This is *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* for anyone on a diet. This book takes you on a journey that explores why so much of what we think we know about diet is epically wrong—and then shares exactly what we need to do to really be healthy—how to eat right, feel energized, and never feel guilty about our food and lifestyle choices again.”

“*Kale and Coffee* isn’t a typical health book—and that’s a good thing. Think Michael Pollan meets Bill Bryson with a dash of Jon Stewart, and that will tell you how illuminating and enjoyable this book is to read. In fact, once I started I had a hard time putting it down. When was the last time you said that about a health book?”

“Kevin has graciously and articulately shared his ongoing health journey. His ability to sift through all types of health philosophies, protocols, and diets and come up with fresh, interesting conclusions—with a ton of humor and no bias—will help you determine what’s going to improve your personal health. It’s rare to read a health book that is both helpful and incredibly entertaining.”
—Alan Christianson, NMD, *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Adrenal Reset Diet*
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“Never, never, never, never, never . . .”

Dave, the owner of Dave’s RV, who has just installed tow bars on our SUV so we can attach our recently purchased motor home, pauses to take a breath. It is December 2008 and very cold in Connecticut.

On his exhale, his breath engulfs my wife, Annmarie, and me. He then continues, counting each word on his fingers till he reaches ten.

“. . . never, never, never, never, never back up.”

Somewhere Outside of Pittsburgh, Two Weeks Later

Our new GPS has taken us on an unlikely route for an SUV. But we’re in something much bigger: a 36-foot motor home with the SUV in tow. It’s getting hairy.

A few minutes before, we turned off a four-lane road onto a residential street, then slowly climbed a steep hill. We have just descended, our engine brake gurgling loudly, and are waiting at a stop sign on the other side of the hill.

At the intersection, following our GPS instructions, I turn right onto a two-lane country road. Quickly, I see we might not make the turn, but it’s too late to do anything else. I’ve already committed. We almost make it, but almost isn’t enough. The RV nudges up against
the guardrail on the opposite side of the road. We’re now blocking both lanes of traffic.

Since we’re stuck, now is probably a good time to start at the real beginning of this story.

It actually starts in bed. I know, it sounds racy—and it is, kind of—but not in the way you might think. Annmarie and I had just gotten into bed after a long day of work. She was a personal trainer at the time. I was also a personal trainer, but I was doing something a little more unusual for 2007. About a year earlier, I had decided to stop seeing regular clients and instead to produce daily health shows on YouTube. My mission was to change the world with a raw food diet, chlorella tablets, and life force. If that sounds crazy to you, you’re not alone. I admit I was a little extreme back then.

Surprisingly, however, my plan was starting to work. Annmarie and I were both in the videos, and we had become big-fish-in-a-small-pond celebrities. Not the type who can’t walk into a Walmart without being recognized, but the type who are regularly recognized in a health food co-op or Whole Foods Market.

But back to bed.

I mentioned to Annmarie that it was going to be a long haul of a career if we kept up the current grind. She was seeing clients all day, driving throughout southwestern Connecticut to get to them. I was sitting at a computer and filming my daily show with my Flip camera, hoping that one day we’d get a book deal, sell a million copies, and finally persuade all our family members to eat and exercise like us. Maybe we’d even move to the Hunza Valley, a Shangri-La–like region in northern Pakistan, and live to be 150 years old together.

The reality was not as crystal clear. We were burning out. If we kept going at that pace, we’d eventually need our own personal trainers to kick our butts back into shape. On top of that, we were feeling unfulfilled. We had clients who were successfully following our programs, but we definitely were not having any luck with getting the family to eat healthy.

“What should we do next?” I asked Annmarie.

“Get an RV and travel around the country,” she responded without a pause.

“Really?”

“Yes.”
Back to Our Little Unintended Road Block

Right now, I’m painfully aware of what that yep really meant and how much cozier it would be in our old bed back in Connecticut than in the driver’s seat of this 30,000-pound beast.

I hear a horn honk.

My blood pressure is rising. We’re blocking a road that has a surprising amount of traffic for before the morning rush. I want to throw our GPS out the window.

“What do we do?” Annmarie, always the water to my fire, asks calmly.

“I don’t know. I think we have to back up.”

“What about what Dave told . . . ?”

“Screw Dave.”

I jump out of the driver’s seat and open the RV door. At the back of the rig, I make a futile attempt to disengage the car from the tow bars. The angle of the RV and the weight of our car make it impossible. There’s not even a millimeter of budge in the pins.

Is this really how this trip going to be? I mutter to myself.

Once we decided we were going to do a crazy thing like leave our families on the East Coast and hit the road indefinitely, it took only a few weeks to buy this motor home from a couple in Montana who had just crossed the country on their own sustainability tour. I had found them online, had emailed them late one night, and the next morning had woken up to a response saying they were putting their RV up for sale. Two days later, I saw a New York Times article about “green” RVs that the couple happened to be featured in. Annmarie and I believe in that synchronicity stuff, so we bought the RV. This was our sign that we were on the right path.

Less than 14 days after that, we were overnighting in a Walmart parking lot outside Cheyenne, Wyoming, in minus-15-degree weather. We had flown to Bozeman, Montana, the day before to pick up this surprisingly massive vehicle fueled by used vegetable oil.

With the personal training business scrapped and my Flip camera in hand—how’s that for a business plan?—we were on the road. And with zero hours of RV driving under our belts, we were more dangerous than high-fructose corn syrup, trans fats, and heavy metals in
KALE AND COFFEE

Our mission was to learn as much as we could about health and nutrition, and upload it to YouTube. We were tired of having to dig deep to find answers about health. Our training clients, friends, and family members were coming up with some pretty interesting theories about health that made no sense at all. But they must have gotten them somewhere. We needed to find the people at the top of the misinformation chain and tie them up so they would never confuse anyone again. (Just kidding—kind of.)

No Filming Here

On this slightly snowy, slightly cloudy day in Steeltown, there is no camera rolling.

I get back into the RV and sit in the driver’s seat.

“Are you going to do it?” Annmarie asks.

“Yep.”

I feel Dave’s steaming breath cloud over my face again as she says this. He said “never” exactly ten times, one for each of his fingers. That’s a lot of times. The dude was serious.

After the stern warning, Dave explained that when you back up a 36-foot Alpine Coach Motorhome with a Jeep Patriot attached to the stern, the Jeep starts to cut quickly at a serious angle. This doesn’t really hurt the RV, but it wrecks the steering, shocks, and front axle of the car. And you can forget about the tow bars: they get mangled like blackberry brambles.

I ask Annmarie to get out, go to the back of the RV, and watch the car to see what happens.

“Stop me if you see or hear something,” I tell her.

I put the RV into reverse, take my foot off the brake, then press the gas pedal lightly. The RV starts to creep backward. I realize that I’ve closed my eyes to avoid seeing whatever awful things might happen to the car or the rig, so I quickly open them again, but I can’t see Annmarie in my rearview mirrors.

Another horn honks. The man in the silver Honda that is second in line to our left is starting to roll down his window. I assume it’s only
seconds before he shows me his southwestern Pennsylvania kindness in the form of a single-finger gesture.

“I can’t see you!” I shout out of the side window. I know Annmarie can’t hear me, but it’s a way to vent my frustration.

I continue backing up, a few inches at a time, then put the RV into drive and whip the steering wheel in the other direction to gain a little more space in front. This turns into a four-point, then an eight-point, then a ten-point turn. The good news is that we’re making progress. With seven more back-and-forth wiggles, I think we’re good to go. Annmarie does, too. She rushes up to the front of the RV and checks the distance from the front of the rig to the guardrail.

“I think you’re good!” she shouts.

I nod and wave her back inside.

With a deep breath of relief, I turn the wheel all the way to the right until it can’t go any farther and step on the gas. We clear the guardrail, but through the open driver’s-side window I hear a tearing sound. I know this isn’t the car—if it were, it would be a more grizzly metal-on-metal sound—but there’s no time to check what it is. It can’t be that bad, I figure. We’re finally moving, and we need to get to Kansas City to give a lecture for a hundred people in two days.

A Few Hours Later . . .

The last few hours of highway driving have helped reduce my anxiety about living in this vehicle for the next two or three years. We stop for lunch at an I-70 rest stop, and when I get out of the RV, I walk to the driver’s-side front to check on the noise I heard before. At the bottom of the leather protective bib—the kind that keep big, flat-fronted vehicles like this from becoming bug collectors—there is a 12-by-12-inch hole. The guardrail had ripped the bib, and the torn material is now flapping in the cold air. It’s just a flesh wound, or maybe more of a battle scar, I think. We didn’t get out unscathed, but we’re safe.

I get back in, and Annmarie hands me a bowl of salad. As we’re eating, I wonder if Dave would have done the same thing we did.
Would he have broken the only rule he ever gives his tow-bar installation customers as they leave his RV repair shop? I think he would have. Sometimes when you’re faced with strong evidence that what you’re doing isn’t working, it’s time to go in a different direction. Sometimes you have to break the rules.

This Book Is about Backing Up, Then Going Full Speed Ahead

When we left Connecticut back in 2008, we had a little bit of money and a YouTube following about as large as the city of Paducah, Kentucky, population (then) 25,577. But we had a dream and enough passion to be dangerous.

Over two and a half years on the road, we earned a master’s degree’s worth of experience while barreling down all the major interstates in our 36-foot classroom. We discovered facts about health and nutrition that neither of us could have imagined learning when we started out. We uncovered myths. We encountered health experts not practicing what they preached. We gave up our bodies for the sake of experiment.

During this time, people started paying attention. To this day, we’ve amassed over 10 million YouTube views and produced 932 shows. We get hundreds of thousands of visitors a month on our blog. I never did make it to big-league media like Oprah, but I was on the Kimora Lee Simmons reality show Life in the Fab Lane. Close enough.

But ultimately, the most shocking thing we found was that most of what we were doing in the name of great health was making us unhealthy. So we needed to rethink some things and back up a bit to get some clarity.

This book tracks our journey. I’ll take you on a trip to the Andes and to a salt-mining operation in Mexico, a butchery class in California, and other places from which we culled important information. And I’ll show you how to break the rules just enough, as we did, to get on the road to great health, great energy, and great lives. This journey is all about eating well, moving well, chilling out, and feeling amazing without having to give up the things you really, truly don’t want to
live without. This approach is guilt-free. Don’t think kale, not coffee. Think kale and coffee.

While you’re reading, you’ll find some actionable tips you can implement right away. And at the end of the book, there’s a 21-Day Jumpstart you can do if you want to throw yourself into transformation full force.

If you like, you can even skip to the Jumpstart right now, but if you do, you’ll never find out why I gave up on almost everything I had learned about health and gained over 35 pounds in the year and a half after our RV trip ended.

Our journey has included many more adventures than I could possibly cover in just one book. So if you feel like you want more, I encourage you to visit my websites, www.RenegadeHealth.com and www.KevinGianni.com. There, you’ll find more insights, links to video interviews, photographs, and additional stories that didn’t make the book but are extremely relevant to your personal longevity plan.
It’s been almost six years since Pittsburgh, and I’m in front of my closet mirror with my pants half-buttoned.

I used to be in shape. I actually used to be one of the fittest guys in the room, but now I’m uncomfortable. I look bloated. I see the belly fat bunch together as I pull the button closer to the buttonhole. It doesn’t make it. I don’t want to leave the house today.

I check the tag of my Levi’s 501s to see if by chance I grabbed Annmarie’s. Nope. Size 34, and they’re like sausage casing around my legs. I try one final time to suck in my stomach. It’s not enough. The button won’t make it.

You wouldn’t think that a popular, sometimes publicly recognized health blogger with hundreds of thousands of people reading his work would dare to gain this much weight, but here is the proof that I had. I’ve become one of my personal training clients from years ago: uncomfortable, disgusted, self-conscious, asking Annmarie if I look fat just about every day. All in all, strange behavior for a guy who’s never before thought twice about his weight.

What’s harder to admit, though, is that I knew all along I was getting fatter, but I just ignored it. In fact, I didn’t even care.

Four years ago, when I was something of a YouTube health celebrity, I was on top of the world. I also felt like I was on top of the
diet pyramid. I ate the cleanest, most nutritious diet on the planet (or so I thought). A raw food, vegan diet. It was not only pure in its contents but also pure in its intention. With this type of diet, you eat straight from the earth, only as nature intended, never harming another living creature. I ate kale salad, raw nut butters, goji berries, raw chocolate, and dehydrated flax crackers. I drank green smoothies, green juice, wheatgrass, and hemp milk. I even tried a fruitarian diet, eating 3,000-plus calories of fruit every day. I tried all these different variations and more for four years. I guess you could say I was a little nuts about my diet.

The me looking in the mirror now would agree. All that health food made me neurotic. I thought about food from the moment I woke up to the second I fell asleep. While eating one meal, I’d be passionately consumed with what I would eat at the next. I was an addict in search of the purest dope: raw, vegan, organic food. When it wasn’t there, I bitched, moaned, and jonesed, making me extremely unpleasant to be around.

I was headed down a path of self-destruction. So it’s not surprising that, like any hard-core addict, I eventually hit rock bottom.

**Sick from Health Food**

My extreme diet was so “healthy” that I made myself sick. About three years in, I started to notice that I was increasingly lethargic and was having trouble getting out of bed. In fact, I would wake up in the morning and stare at the ceiling, wondering if I was seriously ill: chronic fatigue, maybe, or multiple sclerosis, or cancer. After wondering for a while, I’d turn over and go back to sleep, not waking up again until 10 or 11 or even noon.

A few friends and family members suggested that the fatigue might be related to what I was eating, but I was so deeply indoctrinated in the cult of dietary purity that I wasn’t willing to entertain their theories. It wasn’t until I met a renaissance man of sorts, Dr. James E. Williams, that I listened to advice I didn’t want to hear.

James is doctor of oriental medicine, board certified in naturopathic medicine, with a practice in Sarasota, Florida. He and I became...
close during the RV trip, and Annmarie and I spent time with him in Peru and at his home in Florida. James is the type of guy who can explain in fascinating detail how a viral infection can change your DNA, then follow with a story about dancing all night at a club in Havana, Cuba, while drinking brown rum and smoking local cigars.

I remember the day when he gave me the news that no vegan ever wants to hear: “Your adrenals are in deep fatigue. It’s because of your diet. You might consider eating some animal protein”—meat, fish, fowl, dairy.

In the silence after he spoke, I imagined that I heard a cow’s sad moo off in the distance. Another vegan was being coaxed off the wagon. But what James said wasn’t just an opinion: he had tested dozens of my blood markers. Unlike my friends and family who had warned me about my vegan diet, James believed in science. He didn’t advise on a hunch.

The numbers on half a dozen pages of lab reports didn’t lie. As James ran through his own internal checklist, based on 30 years of practice, he read me in detail. I was shocked he could know so much about how I felt.

“I’m guessing you feel pretty lethargic, yes? Low sex drive? How about aggression? Do you have feelings of anxiety? Do you lash out with anger at things that you never did before?”

He nailed some two dozen more symptoms, but he only scratched the surface of what I was feeling emotionally. I was scared. My father died of brain cancer when I was two years old. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was just out of high school. She survived, but two out of two parents with cancer aren’t great odds. You could say I got into this health thing because of what my parents went through. I wondered if feeling this way and continuing to eat this way would lead to a similar diagnosis.

What I had learned clearly wasn’t working. All the lessons about superfoods, supplements, food combining, macronutrient balance, and more that I had picked up from numerous health gurus had produced the opposite results from what they were supposed to. Instead of being a superman, I had hormone levels lower than most men 50 years my senior. I wasn’t working properly.
I also felt like a fake. Everything I had taught our blog readers and YouTube viewers had brought me here. Had they followed my advice, and were they feeling the same way? I was terrified that everything I had published on the Internet was ridiculously wrong.

So what did I do?

I did what any person would do who felt duped and scared after starting a diet he couldn’t maintain. I quit. I quit raw food. I quit being a vegan. I gave up on everything. I de-stricted my diet and set myself free.

I figured that if all the information I had learned to date had produced unhealthy results, I might as well enjoy life, eating things that maybe weren’t as nutritionally pure. I started eating whatever I wanted, but with a slight caveat. We live in California’s East Bay—ground zero for America’s farm-to-table movement—so I promised myself that I would remain on a 90 percent organic diet, since it is so easy here. From grass-fed beef to craft beer, from wine to French fries, I was now a consumer.

I laughed at portion sizes, ignored my lactose intolerance, and lived with my gluten insensitivity. I even got falling-down drunk—but only once. At first it was enjoyable—no, wait, it was awesome. I ate foods like scrapple (a mash-up of pork scraps, cornmeal, wheat flour, and spices), rillettes (meat pâté), and speck (smoked, cured ham)—things I never knew existed even before my raw food, vegan, and fruitarian experiments. I drank Pliny the Elder, possibly the highest-rated craft beer on the planet. I fell in love with sweetbreads. I would have mainlined Blue Bottle coffee if it were possible.

But as time passed, I started to feel that this probably wasn’t going to end well either. My knees started to ache. I came down with more colds than I’d had in the past six years combined. I noticed my abs were getting soft. Some mornings depression crept over me like fog around the Bay Bridge, blanketing me in can’ts, don’ts, and shouldn’ts—doubts I’d never had before.

I was only one and a half years into this new regime, but I realized I was coming to the end of my run. Yes, it was a whole-food, organic diet, but it was almost as extreme as the one before—just in
the opposite direction. I didn’t want to stop, but I knew my health would suffer even more unless I did.

**The End of an Era of Extremes**

Now, rummaging through my closet to find something that fits to wear to the office, I feel frustration. I push the hangers back and forth with waning hope that something that fits will appear. I wish that I could lose the weight tomorrow and have everything back to normal, but I realize this is impossible.

I manage to find a pair of hiking pants with an elastic waistband. I put them on with shame. I may have to wear them for two weeks straight.

On my walk to the office, I don’t like seeing my reflection in the shop windows. I tell myself I can no longer ignore my present state. I tried to do so over the last 18 months, as I noticed my shirts getting tighter and my breath getting shorter as I walked up the two flights of stairs to our apartment. The detail that hit me hardest was the 9:20 mile I averaged in the inaugural Berkeley 10K race. Two years earlier, during a track workout, I had clocked a 6:22 mile.

When I get to the office, I decide to weigh myself on the UPS package scale. (We don’t have a scale at home.) As I step on it, I feel like a cow being weighed before slaughter. The weight calculates slowly, reaching 223 pounds with clothes. I get off and on again. It’s the same. This is the most I’ve ever weighed in my life. In 2011, at the height of my raw food experiment, I was 160. I admit, at 6 feet 2 inches, I looked underweight then. But today, in January 2014, about a year and a half after my anything-goes attitude swept me off my feet, I’m the complete opposite. I blew 38 pounds past my ideal weight of 185 in just 547 days. At this rate, 223 pounds isn’t where I’m going to stop.

As I put away the scale meant to weigh our skin-care shipments, one of our team members opens the office front door.

“Weighting a package?” she asks.

“Yes,” I say, as I slink out of the room. I look back to see her searching for the package.
A Revolution Begins

It’s at times like these, when I’ve been the most uncomfortable, that I’ve made incredible strides.

When we started our personal training business in 2005, we had no money. We thought Annmarie’s network of physical therapists and athletic trainers would get us plenty of new clients, but none came. With only a few days to go before we missed a mortgage payment, we drove through the wealthiest neighborhood in town, placing flyers in the mailboxes of more than 400 homes. That brought us two clients the next day. One paid us up front in cash—the amount of our mortgage payment and more—and the other remained a client for the entire time we were trainers. Our unorthodox effort sparked our new careers then. Now is no different.

Determined, I promise myself this will be the first day of my personal revolution.

But I’m a reluctant revolutionary. I wish my diet of organic gluttony had worked. I wish I didn’t weigh 223 pounds. I wish my cholesterol wasn’t over 200 and my LDL-to-HDL ratio wasn’t 2.8. I wish my omega 3 index was better than just average and that my pregnenolone hadn’t dropped 34 points since the last time I was tested. (Pregnenolone is a hormone that’s a precursor to other hormones, including progesterone.) I wish my jeans would fit. What I really want to be able to do is combine everything I’ve learned about health with the fun of eating whatever I wanted.

Isn’t this the eternal health dream—to have our cake and eat it too? But I seriously wonder: can I take the best of both realms—a commitment to health and an anything-goes attitude—and find a way to live with them both? I am destined to find out.

I have already gathered much of the raw data. I have hundreds of expert interviews I’ve conducted, almost a thousand videos I’ve produced, and more than a thousand blog posts, many of them written from the road as Annmarie and I explored the United States in the RV, aptly named the Kale Whale by one of our readers. I also have all the health contacts I need to give me advice, answers, and tools.

This time, though, I promise myself that I’ll examine everything through a different lens—a lens that looks for the details that matter
most, not the screw-it attitude I had in the past. This time I want to keep only the techniques, foods, and diets that will bring the best results with the least effort.

You could say this is a renegade’s approach. An approach that questions the gurus, the media, the companies that want you to buy their stuff. It’s an approach that focuses on being smart, frugal, and knowing your body—something I’d given up on after that day in James’s office. It’s an approach that will require me to think outside the organic, farm-share veggie box.

I know deep down that great health does not need to be complicated. Now I intend to prove that to myself. So this is where I am: a bloated, out-of-shape health blogger with something to prove—to myself and also to you. I’m going to get back into shape on my own terms and show you that you can do it, too.

Up next, I’m at a swanky hotel in Beverly Hills, California, where I’m beginning to see why everything we think we know about health could be completely wrong . . .